

SALES EXCELLENCE

SALES EXCELLENCE EXPLORES THE BEST PRACTICES ON IMPROVING SALES EFFECTIVENESS BY IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

BIDS & QUOTES

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HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR ODDS OF CLOSING MORE DEALS

When someone asks us to quote on something, our excitement and enthusiasm usually cause us to respond with a resounding, "Yes, SURE WE CAN!" *Why do we do this?* Why do we jump and react rather than think it through? Because business has been slow and now that we have a live one, we want to write it up, fax it back, email it or deliver it, whatever it takes to get a signed contract that very same day!

Is that the correct thing to do or is there something else we should do to optimize the situation?

This speaks to the naiveté of many salespeople. We as salespeople cannot be reactionary and impulsive. We must be more in tune and intuitive to the opportunities that lie before us and deeper in our thought process. Rather than say, "Yes, I (we) can," we need to stop and ask ourselves, "Why are they asking for this quote?" or "What is driving this action?"

If you have been through our program, *The Art & Science of Asking Questions*, you have learned to recognize that potential haste carries risks. We jump in order to please the customer and get our sale of the day. We say, "Yes, we can do that" or "I will get it right out!"

Let's learn to take a deep breath, think it through and ask a few more questions. Let's probe deeper to see what else we can learn. The more we learn, the more opportunities we will likely uncover.

Some questions that can open up more dialogue might be:

- 1) What is prompting you to go out for bid?
- 2) Have you asked other vendors to quote this project as well?
- 3) Is this something you have in place now and want to modify?
- 4) Does this support an existing infrastructure or a new design?
- 5) Is there a set of specifications or a "scope of work" I can bid to?
- 6) Do you have a budget as to what you are looking to spend? If I can deliver a proposal within that range, what would prevent you from moving forward?

If they answer NO to question number 5, a prime opportunity has been presented to you. If they do not have a set of specifications or a "scope of work," help them write one and at the same time spec in your product. Opportunities like this don't come along very often but they are out there and if we are not prepared to ask the questions we will totally miss out.

If you did not ask any questions you would never know where to look for the opportunity. Too many salespeople take the first sign of a sale and run with it only to find out there is more to be understood before closing the sale. You could ask all of the questions or by just asking one, everything else you need to know unfolds.

So as an exercise, put on your thinking cap and ask yourself, "Have I exhausted all of the questions I could possibly ask?" The answer is, you haven't. The true ability of a salesperson is in his or her ability to ask great questions and not just one or two, but a series of questions to uncover more information in order to help move the sales process along.

So we could even ask a 7th question...

7. Are you looking to obtain this information to validate what you are currently paying or is it a service related issue and you are not happy with your current service?

How do you know the real reason behind the request for quote without obtaining more insight and information? You can't, unless you step back, survey the situation and dig a little deeper.

You reduce the odds of closing the deal if you don't ask enough questions and then follow a process that moves you closer to sitting down in front of the client to review your proposal. More importantly, you will absolutely shoot yourself in the foot if you fax, email or mail **ANY** quote or bid. Instead, you must deliver and discuss the bid, quote, or proposal in person; anything less could be suicide. If you do not deliver this in person you do not have the ability to negotiate, read the buyer's reactions, ask additional questions or move to discuss critical issues and more importantly, you may never get another chance again.

We can all too easily fall prey to the excitement behind providing a quote only to discover we don't have enough information to help us come even close to closing the deal. Or we find out our quote or bid has been used for other purposes besides having a real interest in our products and services, let alone having an immediate need. Hence, we must learn to ask more questions.

On a sales blitz where I was doing some sales training and riding with a salesperson, we were delivering a quote and asking questions to help us close the deal. As the buyer thanked us for bringing in his quote, he placed it in his briefcase and said "thank you for coming in" and moved to get up and shake our hands. I sat there briefly and said, "Before we go, can I ask you a question?" to which he responded "certainly." I said, "I am assuming there are at least two other vendors bidding on this since we did not win this previously. So I was curious, if we all come in within pennies of each other, what criteria will you use to determine who will get the contract this year?"

He thought for a moment then said, "I guess I'd have to base it on the level of service." I replied, "Well, if you have another moment I would like to tell you what we have done to improve our service and delivery." We won that contract and this time around, we were not the lowest price.

If we are going to quote or bid on something, our odds increase if:

- We have had the customer in to see our capabilities or have done a capabilities presentation
- We know if there are any other companies bidding as well
- If we can do a survey ahead of the proposal
- If there is any set of specifications or "scope of work"
- If we can write in our specifications or scope of work if they do not already have one
- If we just ask for the order
- If we can position ourselves to be on-site for the delivery of our quote
- If we have a strong relationship with the client
- If the client sees us as a Strategic Business Partner
- If the client trusts us
- If the client knows we always add value and deliver what we say we will
- If we ask enough questions to enable us to uncover the real issues

Closing more deals will happen provided you ask great questions that will help you understand where your landmines are and create a sales strategy that puts you ahead of your competition.

PLAN YOUR WORK AND WORK YOUR PLAN